Bella Coola Indians - Chapter VII

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woman who is pregnant with twins discovers her condition in a dream and avoids the perils of a multiple birth by calling upon a shaman to remove the spirit from one ~~of~~ so that it will be born dead and deformed. Though abhorred, no case is known of the killing of a twin at birth.

Instead of the two children being brought back to the village, word is sent to the father who must join his wife in the temporary shelter in the woods where delivery took place. For one year, they must not return ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ home, and ~~during this period~~ must eat no salmon. Four times during the year they must shift from one shelter to another, each built on the bank of ~~some~~ a small creek. The mother can draw water from ~~this~~ no other stream, ~~alone,~~ and when she leaves it, it dries up immediately. When a year has elapsed, the parents ~~can~~ return home with their children and the father resumes the ordinary routine of life, ~~but~~ but for three years more the mother must remain in the house, only leaving it at night through a hole in the floor. Above all else, she must keep away from the river; she cannot draw water from it, nor can she cut salmon on its bank. One instance is remembered in which the parents of twins failed to observe these restrictions; their legs became swollen and they soon died. There is also danger that if she fail to obey the customary taboos the salmon will be insulted and avoid Bella Coola river.

After four years a mother of twins resumes her normal life, but she is thenceforth endowed with special powers. If she wishes to see anyone who is absent, she has only to think of the person, and in her dreams she will be able to ~~xxxxx~~ see him. She must never try to start up a dying fire by blowing upon it, since to do so would cause a gale. When a person sets out on any kind of an expedition from the house in which a mother of twins is living, the latter must chew a little food and spit it out towards the departing guest, otherwise he will fail in his venture.

Twins themselves, being akin to salmon, have miraculous ability to see their fish-kinsmen and read their thoughts. Bella Coola mythology contains many stories of how they could talk with, and change into, salmon. Nor is such knowledge limited to tales of the distant past.

to kill the child in order to avoid an addition to the family. An unmarried girl who became pregnant ~~almost always~~ often went alone to the forest, ~~and~~ delivered herself without assistance, and killed her child. This was considered to be the kindest act since a fatherless child ~~xxifxaxkaxxdxkaxixxxx~~ was ~~always considered~~ said to be, "Like a Dog." ~~In such a case,~~ Sometimes, ~~xkxxxx~~ the prospective mother ~~frequently asked~~ requested a friend ~~who knew~~ ~~acquainted with~~ conversed with the ~~proper means~~ to cause abortion. ~~This is~~ It was done by kneading the stomach and womb, a method said to be effective and seldom ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ fatal. How to ~~cause abortion~~ do so is common knowledge, but ~~to~~ practise it is considered disgraceful, and the term, ixwotɬ, applied to ~~such an one~~ ~~who does it~~ among is ~~xxxxx~~ the most foul of Bella Coola opprobriums. It is believed that a woman who has had several children ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ close the womb and can prevent further conceptions by wriggling her body on her haunches immediately after the delivery of a child.

Thus far, only the physiological aspects of birth have been considered, but to the Bella Coola ~~the~~ religious concepts are equally important. The blood discharged at birth, and the mother from whom it has come, ~~is~~ is sxaiax, a word difficult to translate. It is applied to a person or thing which is taboo, and combines the significance of "uncanny", "abhorred", "to be avoided", "feared"; perhaps "unclean", in the biblical sense, is the best synonym. Essentially human, this blood is potent not only against supernatural beings, but ~~is~~ dangerous to ~~humans~~ man as well. For this reason a mother must never be delivered within a house. The smell of the ~~xxxxxxx~~ unclean blood might kill all ~~resident in the house~~ dwelling within, or at ~~any rate would~~ least prevent them receiving presents of any kind. Supernatural beings and inherent supernatural powers are alike repelled by it.

A ~~new~~ recent mother is taboo and must exercise due precautions to prevent her baneful influence from affecting her associates, but the woman in whom this power is most ~~xxxxx~~ strongly present is the one who has borne twins. Even younger Bella Coola, sophisticated in most matters, shudder when speaking of twins. Fortunately for the Bella Coola, double births are not common. ~~Such is~~ They are attributed to the entry of a salmon into the womb, ~~with the result~~ so that a twin is half-salmon, half-human. Occasionally a

An elderly Bella Coola described the manner in which her grandmother, a twin related to Sockeye Salmon, was consulted by a man who had been ~~having ill-luck~~ unlucky with his ~~salmon~~ weir. Gazing down into the water, this woman saw that the ~~salmon~~ fish were avoiding his dam because of the charred uprights used in its construction; when these were changed he was successful in his fishing.

Twins are believed to possess remarkable ability from earliest childhood, and even to remember incidents occurring before their birth. When the mother of the twin described in the last paragraph was awaiting delivery in a temprary shelter in the woods, its roof fell, ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ cutting her head. The old woman who mentioned this occurrence stated that ~~both~~ her grandmother, the Sockeye Salmon, and her sister, a Spring Salmon, though still unborn, were aware of the accident and remembered the comments of the mid-wife.

On account of their uncanny power, twins are considered ~~to be~~ weakly and usually die young, in spite of the care lavished upon them and the taboos observed by their parents. Probably the arduous life led by a twin and its parents during the first year after birth lessens its chances of survival, though this explanation does not find favour with the Bella Coola. A dead twin, instead of being buried, is put in a box which is placed in a tree far away from the village. Every year the river changes its course, eating into its banks in order to reach the body, and this continues until it gains its goal and sweeps away tree and coffin.

Childhood Instruction

A Child grows up in a

large house, occupied by several families, in which there is little privacy. The parents provide food and clothing, but more distant relatives take a greater share of responsibility for this than do white people. When food is being given out, a child soon learns that he will be given some of it, and that he will have his portion in any distribution of presents. Furniture, bedding, and other necessities are reduced to a minimum, but a child can, and is welcome to sleep with relatives should his own parents wish to go hunting or fishing. The sense of power possessed by a Bella Coola with many relations is largely intangible, but it has practical applications as well, and these are soon learnt by the child who is fortunate enough to have many kinsmen. Primary responsibility rests with the parents for the care and support of their offspring, but they have the advice, assistance, and material aid of their relatives. Nor are these limited to the kinsmen of either father or mother; all members of the ancestral family take their part in bringing up a child. Housemates also, even if unrelated, take an interest in any child who shares their habitation, irrespective of rank.

Much of the care bestowed on children is of a magical nature and must be reserved for Chapter X. Little boys follow their fathers on hunting expeditions and so acquire knowledge by practical experience, as do girls from their mothers with regard to household tasks and feminine occupations. Even small children are quick to notice the attention paid to the orders of chiefs, and carry out their commands without demur. A disobedient child is beaten or thrown into cold water; it is the parents who usually act in such cases, though a near relative does not hesitate to do so, especially if he is a chief. Like all other children, Bella Coola boys and girls are fond of stories and listen eagerly to the tales told in the long evenings by some old man or woman. Many of these are somewhat obscene but they serve to teach much ancient lore, and at the same time to emphasize many taboos and restrictions which are thus assimilated without definite schooling. They illustrate the laws of morality, as does the public disapproval shown to anyone who infringes some point of etiquette or behaviour. If a child makes fun of a Cat-fish or a Bull-head, he is not told to stop doing so; instead, one of his elders tells him how, in the distant past, there

was a famine, and advises him not to make fun of the fish which alone saved his ancestors from starvation at that time. If a rude little boy laughs at a cripple or a one-eyed man, he is told of Alälals, a Bella Bella urchin who repeatedly mocked a one-eyed man and presently himself lost the sight of one eye.

"Don't laugh at cripples, one-eyed people, or those who are poverty-stricken," say the elders. "If you do, you will become like them yourself."

As a boy grows older, his father assists that he wash, pray, and practise other ritual acts likely to win approval from supernatural beings. At this time, too, he is frequently beaten to inure him to hardship. By the time a youth is eleven or twelve years of age he has become fully acquainted with the principles of the potlatch system, and a wise parent teaches him to remember debts. Taking his son to some quiet spot in the woods, he makes a small bundle of, for example, cedar twigs, and tells him:

"So-and-so at Bella Bella gave you fifteen beaver skins. When you see this bundle you must think of those skins."

Then he makes another bunch, perhaps of spruce twigs, and says to the boy that it represents a present from a Rivers Inlet chief. A bundle of nettle fibre may stand for a Kimsquit debt; one ornamented with a tuft of undyed cedar-bark, a gift from a Tallio chief; a solid piece of alder stem, a local debt; another section of alder stem with a notch in it, another local debt, and so on. The son is expected to listen attentively, and to repeat after his father what each represents. Then the pupil turns his back and the instructor alters the positions of the bundles. When this has been done, his father tells him to look at them and repeat what each bundle signifies. This is repeated time after time until a boy becomes familiar with remembering debts by means of symbols. In later years, if he becomes a chief, he will use this method for bearing his indebtedness in mind. No systemm of standardized signs has been evolved, each individual merely designates what he wishes by a mark which he alone can recognize.

A child grows up in the community, absorbing information and lore involuntarily, learning the activities which he will later practise, fearing the supernatural beings that are dreaded by his parents, marvelling at the power of those endowed with su-

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pernatural ability, and generally fitting himself for the struggle of life. If his parents are wealthy, he may be fortunate enough to be given a sɛsaok name and to partake in imitation potlatches, but he cannot ~~share fully in the activity of the community until after adolescence.~~ himself carry out a ceremony until he reaches manhood.

~~PUBERTY RITES.~~ Adolescence

The change from childhood to adult age is, ~~of course,~~ more obvious with girls than with boys, and only the former ~~alone~~ must observe strict taboos. [redacted] [12]

The coming of adolescence in a boy is recognized by change in voice and the other usual indications. He is neither taboo nor unclean, and consequently does not have to undergo any restrictions on his actions. There is no ceremony to mark the entry of a youth into adult membership of the tribe; ~~instead~~, this comes gradually, and ~~xxx~~ puberty is no more than an indication of increasing age and strength.

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